## PEACE OUT

I begin this chapter standing in my garage. I type it on a laptop acquired from Newegg for $47. It's garbage, with neither the primary or secondary battery able to hold a charge. Thus it is plugged into a power strip that I have affixed to the shelf in the corner. The builders of this house only put a single outlet in this garage, so I have to milk it for all that it's worth. Currently it carries a load of space heater (it is April 7, the day before Fred's birthday, and cold), a pair of fluorescent lights for the greenhouse, the baby monitor, the deep freeze, and, of course, this laptop.

Naturally I have begun the garden in the greenhouse. My sister was kind enough to let me borrow it this year. In it I have a variety of things, some sweet tomatoes and peppers, some mesclun mixes, some *Rudbeckia hirta* that I plan to plant coming up the hill along Galbraith Road, some marigolds for the little enclave beneath Annabelle's room ("Annabelle's Garden"), and various other plants, including both salad and pickling cucumbers, started much too early.

The baby monitor allows me to listen to Annabelle. Unfortunately even at her advanced age of nearly three I still have to. She's been tearing paint off the walls, ripping pages from books, getting out of bed, turning the light on, you name it. This morning Sarah and I awoke to the cat screeching in terror. I had to run in and check her. I have to check her a lot lately.

The freezer stores all I grew last year along with whatever amenities Sarah brings home from Kroger. It's not a large one; I dare say it wouldn't hold the yield from even a small doe. But it's enough to get by. Which is what we do: Enough to get by. To some I probably look to be a bit of a failure considering my vast affinity for knowledge, perhaps how I seemingly have not applied it in the manners which were most befitting in the opinion of others.

But I am not others. I am not far removed from those that got by on what they knew of the world within which they were able to immerse themselves. I suppose I spent too much time with Fred, heard too many stories from my mother about money being unimportant. Well it is, and then it isn't, and that is quite the reason that old saying will always continue to go.

Yet here I am typing on this throw-away laptop in my garage, standing because I still can. It's resting on a makeshift podium thrown together with the cat carrier, the Rubbermaid tub that formerly held the greenhouse parts, and a piece of plywood that I typically use to cover the window opening when I put the window air conditioning unit in during May of every year. This is a writer's space, the garage. This is a writer's world. Am I a writer?

At the most basic level, naturally. I am inputting these words. I am inscribing my thoughts into a form that can be preserved throughout generations to come. But will they endure? Who can say. I would like to fathom that what I put down in these pixels is relatable to some. I would like to give something, return thanks. When I began this it was intended to be a memoir, a record of family history. I have been groomed and equipped to be the one to do it, and I have always had the desire to do so, whether it was instilled in me or simply an innate thirst for preservation of everything that my people are.

I've changed a little since then. My humility, a former detriment to everything to me in life, has waned with age, defiance, struggle, whatever you want to call the amalgamation of it all. I want it to be more. I want to take you with me. I want this to be a journey with me for those that read these words. I want you to defeat sorrow and find strength in what I say in these paragraphs. To simply record a family memoir seems so selfish, though if you pay due attention to the family stories that I tell, it is a great responsibility and blessing, this task that I undertake, and I do it with the most earnest of wills.

I stand in my garage because I still can. There will come a day when I will no longer stand. I pray it doesn't come slowly; I'd prefer to die with the use of my lower extremities intact. No one wishes to be

bedridden or chair-bound. Nothing is lost on me. When I sprained my ankle rather grotesquely in October, I understood that an injury like that at 39 is manageable. I cannot fathom what to expect at 49.

My rehab was simple: Keep moving. Work it out. Keep the blood flowing. All the things you have probably heard from an elder. So that's what I did. I mean, what would old Roland Weldon have done if he sprained his ankle tripping over a limb in the woods? I believe he'd have walked it off.

It is April and I believe it is almost finished but it has been much slower than I had expected. I run on it regularly. It has not a full motion of range but it's getting there. I haven't been making my 15 miles a week running, but it has also been winter, and I must say that I was able to get out many times for a run this winter, with the temperatures setting records a couple of times if I'm not mistaken, Chris Bailey.

But the lesson was delivered, be it by God at my own iniquity, that more or less I'm getting too old for this shih tzu. It was important for me entering my forties to find myself in better physical form, at the least in preparation for the incredible physical shape one must be in to keep up with a feral two-year old. I suppose it is relevant to mention that I also watched Dad go through his age of reinvention. I can't even recall how old he was at the time, but I think I figured it up one day in my head in the shower and it had to be just about the exact same time.

That's a funny story of the old man right there. Down in the basement with his feet locked under a dresser full of Mom's miscellanies doing sit-ups listening to Bon Jovi tapes. And what's the very first thing that came to your mind when you read that sentence? Of course it was that one particular song when he got up and danced like he was Stallone in Philly. And then the push ups. There were free weights. He did upright rows and curls and the likes. He was halfway there.

And now I do the same. I whittle my frame away with antiquated forms of movement, the most primitive exercises it would appear. I secured that reel lawn mower last year with credit card points. And what a scam that is, a scheme to jack your interest rate to here or there, minus a few miniscule deep percentage points. Then they'll throw you some kind of virtual currency, something where you can see a picture on a pixelated screen without inspecting firsthand. And you will buy it because it has been made to appear to you a bargain. Sucker.

But as always I drift to other thoughts. Which is what the mind can do to you, especially when you halve about a half of one. (My old Papaw Fred gets half the credit for that one.)

The fact that I am aging is a reality and something that everyone feels all in one moment. No one comes to this conclusion over time. That's just not how it transpires. It would be more useful that way. Our greatest endeavors, as a highly informed and refined species, are bent upward toward survival. Nobody really wants to die. Those that die the youngest want it the least because their appreciation for all that they see is not undermined by what they have not yet seen. One could say that it's an existential argument. That one has the brain. It very much is.

I grew up very Baptist. I very much adhere to my faith to this day. It has been a major influence in my development as a person living in this society. This society is a funny one. It has been, to me, even before the impact of electronic correspondence, a room of listening and not speaking. It is infinitely expounded by technology at this point, and I suppose that's just a reflection of how it's always been for me. And I don't care to complain. A lot of my listening was with my ears upon my elders, and from them I learned great things. I still learn from them in their absence.

But death is a reality. And it follows you. You run from it, sure. These are concepts that have reverberated through every written or spoken story through time. It's about how and when you feel it. That's where numbers take over. You start thinking of math. You weigh statistics here, statistics there. Are they skewed? Who really ever knows.

The reality is that one day, we all die. It'd be nice if it would be on the same day so we could all go

together. That would be closer to holy I surmise. But that's just not how the sequence of the universe is ordered.  Call it a very primitive belief, but continuity involves overlap and extension. Back to my principles with regard to recording this particular piece of history: I want everyone to get a new mindset. Appreciative. Gracious. Understanding. Prepared. But most of all, prescient. Pay attention to the past because it duly recreates itself.

I cannot fathom I am doing this because it does indeed feel like a curse upon myself. I have chosen to write this, my last chapter, with no intention of dying anytime soon, but with the reality that I am at the mercy of attorneys. Sarah and I are unmarried, a girl and a little boy due in three weeks, and I am trying to force out an account of all this during the scant moments I have because I fear that some obscure incident could become me and take me to my new home. And would that be so irrational?

When you come from a large family, and they didn't have much money or knowledge of better health practices, you get to see a lot of death, in many cases early on. I have been to funerals since I was a mere lad. Learning it isn't fun, but knowing it is a blessing. You learn that you do, indeed, now have a privilege, a gift from your elders. You can move it forward.

But even as seemingly comfortable with death as I became when I was so close to it, death from a distance always bored through my soul. The news of Terri passing was debilitating to me when I was locked into the Hudson Valley. I had just formed what I felt was a much closer bond with her. So strange, a man of numbers as I am, that she would die on the same day as Ora, Fred's old man. The universe has a strange sequence sometimes.

I wasn't there. I wasn't there for Stefanie. I wasn't there for Demaree. These are the things that plague you. You want everyone else to survive. It's a bit of the heart and soul of who I am. And I spent two weekends with Fred when he was in the hospital in Bloomington, but it was not enough. I wanted to be there when he took his next big step.

Dad very succinctly said during his eulogy that the old man left on his own terms. I can't even paraphrase my father because he spoke so eloquently that day and I cannot do it justice. But I shall make an attempt: "He stuck around for so long because he knew he could take it and we couldn't." It's the precise sentiment. That's strength. That's beauty. And it's what I come from.

This is the last chapter in what I have decided to go and fill in through the middle as time goes on. This is both my art and my life. This is me, your humble navigator on the voyage to appreciation and preservation. I won't be going anywhere for awhile. No, not far. Not long ago, not far away. If I leave, be it anytime soon…

Well what is soon? I really don't know. We don't. Something I learned in Liberty Baptist Church. I plan to be here to incessantly annoy you all for as long as I possibly can. But if I have to leave, you'll always have this chapter. You'll always have of me what I have given you here. You will always know and love me, because I am truly your conviction, your own, if you are still reading this to the final word. Which I have decided should be *awesome*.

**FATHER,**

Now I come to you in this peaceful space to speak to you with reverence with hopes that His Holy Spirit will envelope me and bless me with the grace to continue on. It is in these moments that I come to you as My Benevolent Keeper, and it is not a thing that I tend to do, out of my utter humility and timidity, to speak to you in a room amongst others, to allow them to partake of my blessed conversation with You. It is only now that I bring myself before you in this manner. My nature is quiet and kind, oh Lord, and I pray that you forgive me for venturing away from our normal format of reveremce.

Lord I gladly accept the pain and burdens that come to me in this lifetime for the joy of Your Grace beyond. It is not without the strife of life that we can make ourselves better. I know what it means to learn from these tragedies that befall me. I have been taught by my elders about my talents and how they should best be applied for Your service. Here I come to you now to tell you I try. It is not always in ways that seem to make sense to so many but Lord, do I try.

As I come to you now I want you to bless those around me. Those that err in the ways of the human world, forgive them. And Lord forgive me for my transgressions, the replete past of miscalculations I might have made along the way. Know that many times I felt as though your Divine Presence led me toward an oasis but misjudged the landscape and Your greater plan for me. Stumbles along the way have only made me fall in line with the greater path before me.

Here I have intended to illuminate the world with words, dear Lord. It was not the initial idea but you know how things tend to fall into that path. It has been over seven years since I started this. Before Annabelle was even a concept I began a record of my life's journey. Within these pages, Lord, I have told the truth and for that I am proud. The world is full of deception in these times and if I must die a pauper then I will at least have my word. This is what I wish, no demand, from my children much the same.

Setbacks have frequented me and that is just part of the game. You know where I am lacking and you know where I have failed. Where others have failed me, Lord, I know you are a forgiving and loving God, that we are all a part of Your greater plan, and it is with that grace that I can find peace where the raging confines of turmoil would otherwise devour me.

It is that I sometimes come to You for peace and I pray that this is done selflessly. Here I write to you and I pray before you in the company of others, a world watching, perhaps generations, and I must reiterate that it is not for anything greater than me. Where is the selfishness in selfless, Lord, that a man might only pray quietly, that when he might then speak to You before others, it feels to him as though it is no longer pure, that the personal relationship of faith has been violated?

These are the struggles of my mind, or so they might say. But Lord there is no struggle of mine to carry thought. It is perhaps the impenetrable permeation of thoughts that consume me. And in all of this, for my mind and my abilities, I thank you for blessing me with this gift to assess the world in ways that others might not consider.

Heavenly Father, I come to you now to ask for your guidance, understanding, and your imprint, to make my words make sense, to make my story whole. For where I am deficient please forgive me and allow me that path to be better. Enrich my soul with your presence, Lord, and may those around me receive your blessings as well.

For it is with a kindred heart I bring these things to you now, and forever, as long as I live, in the flesh or in words alone.

Amen.

## FOREW@RD

Divine existence: It would not be such a gift if it were not set to be cut short. Because we must pass on the moments of our continually circulating blood and undulating lungs an eternity that spans a duration that to us resembles a finite period. And then it stops: Divine lack of existence.

We do not stop. As a species, highly developed though sometimes it may seem otherwise, we cling to what has been left behind. More modern (Dawkinsesque) thought holds these keepsakes in accordance with the idea of memes, though the word has since been polluted by pseudo-intellectuals. I subscribe to this idea, in addition to others, many of which to some might conflict with the very meme concept of which I have initially mentioned.

Because we develop directly from those around us during our upbringings, those people live on within us long after they have passed from divine existence, or earthly breathing ceases. All that they had learned from those around them that passed on subsequently to us continues to perpetuate itself. Some of these things never die. They are passed from generation to generation and can span timeframes which we have no conceivable chance to quantify.

Divine existence then lends itself to legacy. Legacy is what we leave when we leave. Whatever footprint we are able to create during our corporeal days will be what we then pass on to our ancestors, our society and God and science willing, the Universe.

Technology has given us the ultimate opportunity for legacy building. In genealogical studies of my own paternal ancestry I've reached a dead end. The men of my surname had little grasp on framing the foundation of a legacy. There are reasons for this. One clear-cut reason ties to lack of education. This creates a lack of understanding of legacy while also inhibiting the ability to make a semi-permanent mark on history with written word, photography, personal artifacts, et cetera.

I imagine you can see where I'm going with this now. I could write a semi-factual novel about my upbringing and use it to spawn a political career that might catapult me to the Office of President of the United States of America. But I'd rather not do that. I'd much rather leave an entirely factual account of where I've been, what I've done, what I've seen, and who I've known, those who were around to help shape me. I want to pass along as much as I can of what they have passed along to me.

Is it selfishly vain motivation that drives it? I don't think it is. To answer honestly, I might self-discover the motivation as I chisel these characters into pixels on a screen. And that will just be another great journey through this divine existence.

I think about it a lot, death. There are those among us that obsess over it, that don't know a day of living without a thought of life leaving. I do not function in this way. I have known death, I have seen it, and I have felt it close and cold around me at times. You can read that spiritually if you wish or you can read it with a measure of psychology about the way the mind processes the expiration of a fellow human being. But by my own measure, I have learned about this legacy thing. I have seen the elderly pass with as little to nothing of a footprint as a twenty year-old. Part of it, the motivation: I want to speak for them. They no longer have their mouths to form sounds, their lungs to push air past their vocal chords. And for those that exist generations after I am gone, the seeds of my seeds, they will know something of what they are from where those origins came. Continuity anchored in the beautiful technology of today that we so often take for granted.

*Have you forgotten*
*You're still dying in their world*
*Just to be seen, and not to be heard*

There are many who have mastered the craft of building a legacy. Those of the prominent and wealthy aristocracy of America leave a massive footprint for the subsequent scions of their presumably grand existence. I cannot vouch for their motives but I can't fault them for this solitary thing: They want *something* to perpetually endure for those that follow them, whatever it may be. And for that I do respect them. I do not agree with the manner with which so many of them lay their foundations and I do not view some of their individual legacies favorably in the least, but they've left it. It's there: Family wealth, family name, pedigree, all that is required to keep the family afloat when the patrons pass along.

I'm not inspired by money. I never have been. Nor fame, particularly. Unfortunately it is an attachment to writing something like this, to leaving a mark. When I thought about this entire idea, it occurred to me that I should keep it as a family keepsake, that it would be personal and pertain to the things closest to me, those things which I seek to protect. But it's not enough for me just to leave a record of my forty-some years. I feel compelled to tell a story.

The great American story? I hardly think so. But it is **a** great American story. And this is what I want to tell. I want to tell something that is relatable. I want it to be written so that anyone can read it. I want to, as futile as some may think it to be, inspire as many as I can. These times are not the most pleasant, but many times we do not do ourselves much in the way of favors. I can say this unequivocally because during my years I, myself, haven't exactly maximized my potential at all times. I hope to change that with this account.

I have been incredibly fortunate to be conceived and born into a situation that has allowed for a truly great ride through divine existence. I also have a clinical diagnosis of attention deficit disorder. Fortunately for me, most of America likely does as well. When I was a child they handed out Ritalin like it was candy. It's about the same now except I think there are probably about fifty different branded pharmaceutical alternatives.

The point being: I'm going to tell you a story, the story of me, and I am going to jump all over the place. It's not an aversion to chronology; it's really just more of a linkage and association thing. Things in my mind become linked, tied together by some mental connection, and I thusly recall things in waves. The mind is a database of linkage; we sometimes forget that our virtual foundations were implemented to mimic the human brain.

I must also establish as I am laying the groundwork for how I would like to tell this story that I do not intend to change any names. Rest easy if you are reading this and you know that I'll make mention of you, however. I know which stories to keep unspoken. I wouldn't compromise anyone's present for the benefit of future generations.

For those folks, the ones reading this long after I'm gone, I'm going to tell you a lot of things. I'm going to tell you things that came to me from other generations. I'm going to tell you how things work in these times. I'm a middler. I spent much of my youth connected with elders and I plan to spend my elderly years surrounded by youth. (More on this to follow.) The crux of what I'm saying is that I will give you as much as I can of a giant time span about life on this big ball.

I've never written a book. I know it's time-consuming and difficult. I know it's not easy to have a publisher sign off on it. But I'm not worried about that right now. I'm not worried about it being propagated in my lifetime. I just want the record marked so that one day it might be of some use to someone somewhere throughout his or her own divine existence. If my form is bad, my use of language is not the best, then I must apologize, but language is meant to change, and it would serve for the better that my use of language would exist as an alternative to some of the degradation of language that mass mobile

communication has spawned.

But that’s an aside. I have told you the story of how I want to tell you a story. Now it’s all about the timeline. Where should I start?

Well how about the middle?